

Next Steps

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>Author: Jordanna Morgan
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>RatingWarnings:** G.
>Characters: Gobber and Stoick.

>Setting: Following the film's climactic battle.

>Summary: Gobber and Stoick have a conversation about the future.
>Disclaimer: They belong to Dreamworks. I'm just playing with them.
>Notes: Just taking a little opportunity to write the endearing old-warriors friendship between Gobber and Stoick. (â€|And yes, apparently I still have a preoccupation with Viking!automail.)

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><p>The glowing-hot axe head hissed and steamed as it was plunged into cold water. Gobber stared down at the bucket, watching the metal fade from orange to dull red to gray-black, but not really seeing it at all.<p>

He wasn't succeeding very well at keeping his mind on his work. At least, not for the past several hours. Not since he completed the one task that had taken up his thoughts since the Vikings returned from the battle on Dragon Islandâ€|

Weighty footsteps preceded the creak of the workshop's door, and Stoick entered. The chief's face was so solemn that for one short moment, Gobber felt his heart splash to the bottom of his ample gut.

"Stoickâ€"is Hiccupâ€"?"

"He's alright," Stoick said hastily, with a placating gesture. "Still unconscious, but he has more of his color back today. The wound looks to be coming along well."

Gobber raised a thoughtful eyebrow. He turned to his worktable, to replace the tongs attached to his arm-stump with his favorite hook.

"Well, after all, he's a young pup. A body heals up better at that age. In factâ€"he's so young, one of these days, he won't even remember what it was like to have his leg." An uncertain pause. "You know, I'm a little surprised you left him alone."

Stoick half-smiled wanly through the thickness of his fiery beard. "It isn't as if I could do anything for him just now. And besidesâ€" The twist of his lips softened. "Toothless is with him."

A wry smile quirked Gobber's own mouth. "So, it's Toothless now. Not devil, or beast, or even that dragon."

"He saved my son, Gobber."

Stoick lifted his eyes, glancing through the window of the workshop. Gobber followed his gaze. In the field beyond, Fishlegsâ€"who seemed, along with Astrid, to have taken the most quickly to Hiccup's art of taming dragonsâ€"was trying to give some sort of instruction to the Twins and their new Zippleback. It was probably a lost causeâ€" but Gobber had a feeling Ruffnut and Tuffnut would figure it out eventually. They were part of the same new breed as Hiccup, meeting new ideas as a challenge instead of a threat.

"I think Toothless might have saved more than that," Gobber remarked quietly.

The chief glanced sideways at his old friend, and then turned from the window, knotting his beefy arms over his chest. "I must say I'm a little surprised by you too." He tilted his head somberly toward Gobber's peg-leg, and the hook at the end of his arm. "After all of thatâ€" you seem to have forgiven easily enough."

"I never had malice for the dragons because of this." Gobber regarded his hook with a rueful shrug. "The beasts were only doing what their instincts told themâ€"and, I suppose, what we made them do to protect themselves. We've all of us just wanted to survive, Stoick. And maybe nowâ€" all our chances of that will be better working together."

A thin smile crossed Stoick's lipsâ€" but his response was cut short by a wild howl from outside.

Looking through the window, the two men watched in consternation as, with a rush of flapping wings, a flame-shrouded Monstrous Nightmare all but crashed down into the field. The dragon's violent landing

dislodged a highly agitated rider in the shape of Snotlout, who sprinted for the nearest watering trough, slapping frantically at the smoking seat of his pants.

"Seems we have a lot to learn," Stoick murmured dryly.

"Not exactly a Viking's best strength, is it? But I think we'll manage." Gobber grinned. "And who knows. Now that they're living among usâ€| maybe dragons will learn a thing or two from Vikings."

Stoick let out a snort. "Odin forbid."

"Anyway, Stoick, I'm glad you came by. I have something I want to show you."

Gobber gestured with his hook, and stumped over to the far end of his work table. With a flick of his wrist, he jerked the buckskin covering from the object that lay there.

The eyes of his old friend widened. Stoick stepped forward, taking in the sight. He reached out toward it; but his fingers froze just above the surface of metal and wood, as if he feared it was too delicate to touch.

"Gobberâ€|" he whispered, staring down at the artificial leg.

"Not that you have me entirely to thank for it." Gobber rested his hand upon the prostheticâ€| and an unfamiliar feeling tightened in his throat. He gulped it away quickly, but still found himself blinking at a warmth in his eyes as he concluded. "Most of it's from a design Hiccup drew for meâ€|but I just laughed it off as another of his fool contraptions. It's only, looking at it nowâ€| He's been brilliant all this time, you know, Stoick. We were just too pig-headed to see it."

At last, Stoick's hand came to rest lightly on the man-made limb. His broad palm brushed down the length of it, and he looked up at Gobber, with a sort of bewildered wonder in his eyes.

"If he meant for you to have one of these, thenâ€|"

Shaking his head, Gobber stamped twice on the floor with his own primitive whalebone peg. "I'm used to what I have. It'll suit him better."

With a warm smile of gratitude, Stoick squeezed Gobber's shoulder. "Thank you."

"â€|There's one other thing, too, Stoick."

Gobber moved across the room, to a sawhorse covered by a piece of tattered sailcloth. He withdrew the canvas, revealing a saddle of smooth, glossy leather, with the intricate riggings that would connect its left stirrup to the furled dragon tailfin beside it.

The chief's smile deepened. In his eyes, Gobber noticed the faint sheen of moisture, a thing he had seen just once beforeâ€|"on the day Stoick's son was born.

"You knew," Stoick murmured.

"Well, after all, you did let 'the offspring of lightning and death' into your house." Gobber smiled cheekily. "And Hiccup is bound to make an impressive chief one day with that on his side, isn't he?"

A hearty laugh erupted out of Stoick. He slapped Gobber on the back, and then gently picked up the artificial leg from the table.

"Let's take this to the house. I want Hiccup to have it when he wakes up."

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